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Ethics, power, internationalisation and the postcolonial: a FDA of policy documents in two Scottish universities

Author(s):[Dalene Swanson](#) (presenting), [Emma Guion Akdağ](#) (presenting)

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Contribution

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The value and extent of the internationalisation of Higher Education (HE) is often defined in terms of scale, for example, between 2011 and 2012 the UK provided higher education services for 425,256 international students (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2014) and academic mobility has been projected to increase by 3.7% annually until 2200, should current trends continue (Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013). The UK hosted 15% of the world's 3.4 million international students in 2009, an increase of 5% in 2002 to 368,968 in 2009 (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). However, 2012/13 admissions saw an unpredicted decrease in numbers (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2014), which is commonly presented as being of concern to many education providers as large proportion of university funding is dependent on sustaining an increasing upward trend. Within the Scottish context, between 2013/2014 there were 170,800 EU and Non EU students studying at undergraduate and postgraduate levels within HE institutions (ibid). Furthermore, Scotland hosts the highest percentage of international students in the UK at 21% (Tindel, et al., 2013), contributing around £441m to the Scottish economy generally (Hyslop, 2013). Universities are often judged on the impact of their internationalisation strategies by data-driven approaches, looking at the proportion of international staff, proportion of international students and proportion of research papers published with at least one co-author from another country, leading to ranking tables declaring the 'World's most international universities 2016 (Bothwell, 2016).

It is evident from these facts and figures that the internationalisation discourses in HE are dominantly managerial and corporate, contributing to what has become recognised as the ongoing neoliberalisation of HE institutes (Andreotti, 2013, de Sousa Santos, 2014). It has become a terrain for marketisation agendas and a means to generating more income (Swanson,

2011). HE has become synonymous with training for 'employability', which may threaten what some value in universities, the scope for critical analysis (Levidow, 2002). Internationalisation in this context could also be framed within exchange relations according to Emerson's power-dependency theory (Emerson, 1964), locating power at the interdependencies among actors embedded in social relations. It may also be argued that the discourses of internationalisation illustrate Foucault's power-knowledge concept (Foucault, 1977), which states it is not only power that has the exclusive right to generate knowledge, but also that knowledge gives power over people. A postcolonial perspective allows for a more intellectual and theoretical critique of the internationalisation discourses, addressing ethics, more specifically ethics in relation to power and its investments in HE institutions and the HE and Further Education sectors at large.

The objective of this research study is to investigate the extent to which the relationship between power and knowledge mediates and modulates the discourse of policy documents relating to internationalisation from two Scottish universities.

Method

The research examines regimes of power by deconstructing a system of meaning-making constructed historically and discursively. It does so in order to investigate how and why some categories of argumentation have come to be taken as true in the context of HE. In order to narrow the field of internationalisation and its activities that spread across the globe, this research explores policy texts related to internationalisation from two Scottish universities. Discourse in documents is analysed from two different sets of data sources; firstly, publicly available documents that are specific internationalisation strategy reports and secondly, documents that are a strategy document or annual reports with a focus on internationalisation.

Critical Discourse Analysis draws inferences from structural and linguistic features in texts and is informed by the work of Foucault. However, 'the process of analysis is always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint' (Wetherell, 2001:384). Therefore, to seek a definitive account is a misguided undertaking. Ball (2013) believes that theory in educational research should be 'to engage in struggle, to reveal and undermine what is most invisible and insidious in prevailing practices', supporting Foucault's work as continuing to provide a set of effective concepts for intervening within discourses of power.

A distinguishing characteristic of Foucauldian discourse analysis is the stress on power relationships. It looks at how power is structured through discourse and through positioning strategies and offers a stronger focus on excluded discourse and the effects of power. It is the effects of power which 'the postcolonial' then takes up in addressing issues of ethics and of the conditions of a world structured in accordance with 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1977).

Expected Outcomes

This critical analysis and reflection on the processes of internationalisation displayed in these two universities' documents will enable a deeper understanding of the assumptions regarding knowledge generation and diffusion. This challenging of the underlying assumptions and beliefs of HE will facilitate a move beyond power relationships and unpack the work of internationalisation discourses by looking at how these discourses shape the dominant view. The aim is to reveal what knowledge is foregrounded, what alternative discourses are excluded and to investigate how internationalisation is described and effected. The lack of critical orientation engagement with internationalisation discourses that prevents alternative discourses from emerging may be the possible 'effects' of overwhelming amounts of managerial and neoliberal discourse in policy documents. Furthermore, the postcolonial dimension allows us to speak of the ethical effects of such power in its investments in global equality, injustice and oppression.

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Author Information

Dalene Swanson (presenting)
University of Stirling, United Kingdom

Emma Guion Akdağ (presenting)
Heriot-Watt University, United Kingdom